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ABSTRACT

Designed for global education at the high school level, this document presents statistics on malnutrition, infant mortality, and illiteracy in developing nations. The statistics are compared with private and government expenditures of wealthy nations. Examples of the statistical information for developing nations are: more than 500 million people in poor countries suffer from chronic anemia due to inadequate diet; in poor countries, 100 out of every 1,000 newborns die before their first birthday; and Ethiopia has one doctor for every 73,000 people. Statistics from wealthy countries include: North Americans spend more on chewing gum, tobacco, and alcoholic beverages each year than the entire annual budgets of many poor countries; rich countries consume 70 percent of the world's food grains, most of which is used to feed beef and dairy cattle; and the amount that the world spends in half a day for military purposes could finance the entire malaria eradication program of the World Health Organization. The document includes a poem, "The Great Tablecloth," by Pablo Neruda, suggestions for action, and a brief list of reference materials. (KC)

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WORLD HUNGER: FACTS

FACTS FOR ACTION NO. 1

OCT 82

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Oxfam America, Boston, MA

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World Hunger: Facts

Bangladesh, Oxfam photo

"Few people in the wealthy countries have any detailed conception of the extent of poverty in the Third World or of the forms that it takes. Many hundreds of millions of people in the poorest countries are preoccupied solely with survival and elementary needs. For them, work is frequently not available, or pay is low and conditions barely tolerable. Homes are constructed of impermanent materials and have neither piped water nor sanitation. Electricity is a luxury. Health services are thinly spread, and in rural areas only rarely within walking distance. Permanent insecurity is the condition of the poor. There are no public systems of social security in the event of unemployment, sickness or death of a wage earner in the family. Flood, drought or disease affecting people or livestock can destroy livelihood without hope of compensation. In the wealthy countries, ordinary men and women face genuine economic problems — uncertainty, inflation, the fear if not the reality of unemployment. But they rarely face anything resembling the total deprivation found in the poor countries. Ordinary people in the poor countries would not find it credible that the societies of wealthy countries regard themselves as anything but wealthy."

From: **North-South: A Program for Survival.** The report of the Independent Commission on International Development Issues under the chairmanship of Willy Brandt

The peasant in the field ate
his poor quota of bread,
he was alone, it was late,
he was surrounded by wheat,
but he had no more bread;
he ate it with grim teeth,
looking at it with hard eyes. . . .

Eating alone is a disappointment,
but not eating matters more,
is hollow and green, has thorns
like a chain of fish hooks
trailing from the heart,
clawing at your insides.

Hunger feels like pincers,
like the bite of crabs,
it burns, burns and has no fire.
Hunger is a cold fire.
Let us sit down soon to eat
with all those who haven't eaten;
let us spread great tablecloths,
put salt in the lakes of the world,
set up planetary bakeries,
tables with strawberries in snow,
and a plate like the moon itself
from which we can all eat.

For now I ask no more
than the justice of eating.

—Pablo Neruda
Excerpts from
The Great Tablecloth

Nicaragua. OA photo

Somalia. UNICEF photo

More than one billion people in the world are chronically undernourished. Between 700 million and 800 million people live on incomes insufficient to adequately secure the basic necessities of life.

15 to 20 million people die each year of hunger-related causes, including diseases brought on by lowered resistance due to malnutrition. Three out of every four of these (75 percent) are children. Over 40 percent of all deaths in poor countries occur among children under five years old.

At least 100,000 children in Asia and Africa go blind each year from Vitamin A deficiency caused by inadequate diet. More than 500 million people in poor countries suffer from chronic anemia due to inadequate diet.

In wealthy countries, 12 to 15 out of every 1,000 newborn infants die before their first birthday. In poor countries, 100 out of every 1,000 newborns die before their first birthday.

The world currently spends an average of $550 billion a year producing, buying and selling military weapons. The world spends about $22 on military purposes for every dollar it spends on official development aid.

One out of every four human beings (25 percent) has no access to safe drinking water. In the 40 lowest income countries, fewer than 30 percent of the people have access to safe drinking water. In Ethiopia, for example,

Kampuchea. OA photo

fewer than 6 percent of the people have regular access to safe drinking water, and most of that water is located some distance from where they live.

In Britain, there is one doctor for every 880 people. Nigeria has one doctor for every 44,620 people, while Ethiopia has one doctor for every 73,000 people. If someone in Britain gets sick, he/she shares the chance of getting a hospital bed with 100 other sick people. A Nigerian takes his/her chances with 2,410 other sick people.

What the world spends in half a day on military purposes could finance the entire malaria eradication program of the World Health Organization.

In 83 countries of the world, 3 percent of the landowners control almost 80 percent of the land. In Argentina, for example, 2 percent of the landowners own 75 percent of the land.

Less than 60 percent of the world's cultivable land is currently under cultivation. Less than 20 percent of the potentially cultivable land in Africa and Asia is under cultivation. Most of that land is controlled by large landowners or is open country.

The price of one military tank vehicle could provide classrooms for 30,000 students, or improved storage facilities for 100,000 tons of rice.

Kampuchea. OA photo

Two U.S.-based corporations control half of the world's wheat trade. One British corporation controls 80 percent of the

world's production of cooking oils. Two North American companies control most of the world's production and supply of farm machinery and parts.

Thirty six of the world's 40 poorest countries export food to North America. Africa, where more than half the population suffers from chronic protein deficiencies, exports protein foods to Europe.

"When you rip aside the confusing figures on growth rates, you find that for almost two-thirds of humanity, the increase in income has been less than $1 a year for the last twenty years" (Mahbub ul Haq, Third World economist).

In the wealthy countries, 20 percent to 25 percent of the average family's income is spent on food. In most poor countries, the average rural poor family must spend as much as 75 percent to 85 percent of its income on food. In India, for example, the poorest 20 percent of the people spend as much as 85 percent of their income just to obtain food, but consume an average of fewer than 1,500 calories a day each (2,300 calories a day is the recommended minimum to maintain normal health and activity).

More than 800 million adults (more than half of the world's population) cannot read or write. Two-thirds of these illiterates are women.

Kampuchea. OA photo

Of all the children in poor countries now entering school, only one in five (20 percent) will complete the equivalent of eighth grade. Most of these will be male students.

The richest 20 percent of the people in 44 different countries consume 10 times what the poorest 20 percent of their fellow citizens consume. In Brazil, the rich consume 17 times more than the poor, and in South Africa, 29 times more.

One-half of one percent (0.5 percent) of one year's world military expenditures would pay for all the farm equipment needed to increase food production and approach self-sufficiency in food-deficit, low-income countries by 1990.

Upper Volta. OA photo

Every day, the world produces two pounds of grain for every man, woman and child on earth. That is enough to provide everyone 3,000 calories a day, well above the recommended daily minimum of 2,300 calories.

The rich countries, including the United States, Western Europe, Japan and Australia, consume 70 percent of the world's food grains. Most of that is used to feed beef and dairy cattle.

In 1974, less than 10 percent of the grain which rich countries fed to their cattle would have entirely eliminated the grain shortages of the poor countries for that year. Although the United States dominates the world's rice trade, one-half (50 percent) of U.S. rice production goes directly into making breakfast cereals.

The average North American consumes 2,000 pounds of grain a year, but only about 150 pounds of that is consumed directly as grain or flour. The rest, 1850 pounds, is consumed as milk, eggs, meat and alcoholic beverages. The average Asian eats less than 400 pounds of grain a year, most of that in its original form of grain.

The poor countries have nearly 75 percent of the world's population, but consume only about 15 percent of the world's available energy. The two New York Trade Center tower buildings in Manhattan consume more electricity in one night than the capital cities of many poor countries consume in a month.

North Americans spend more on chewing gum, tobacco and alcoholic beverages each year than the entire annual budgets of many poor countries.

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Zaire. Oxfam photo

Ideas for Action

Form a study group with friends, colleagues, members of your congregation or school. Select a facilitator and use the group to discuss hunger-related issues. You want to sharpen each person's understanding of the issues and ability to articulate them. What you learn in the group can be a guide to further action. Contact the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, 78 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108, for their HUNGER AWARENESS MANUAL, a guide to study and action.

Form a small group to investigate hunger in your own community. Food banks and soup kitchens provide good information on local poverty and what individuals can do. The Cornucopia Project of Rodale Press, 33 East Minor Street, Emmaus, PA 18049, provides good resources on domestic food issues.

Write letters. Write to newspapers about current food and development issues. Contact Oxfam America for guidelines on press releases, writing articles and letters to newspaper editors. Write or call your Congressional representatives. Inform them about hunger and development issues and let them know your views on the impact of U.S. policies on Third World development. Excellent materials on how to influence Congress and up-to-date information on development-related legislation can be obtained from Bread for the World, 32 Union Square, New York, NY 10003.

Organize a hunger-awareness event in your community. Each November **Oxfam America** sponsors the Fast for a World Harvest. Groups and individuals across the country fast for a day and donate their food money to Oxfam America. It is a great activity for both educational and fund-raising purposes. A Fast Organizers' Kit is available from Oxfam America. But you don't have to wait until November to hold a hunger-awareness day. Organize a walk for hunger, or a teach-in and film showing on food/development issues.

Call or write Oxfam America for a free catalogue of literature and audio-visual materials. We can also provide you with hand-outs and other educational and fundraising ideas.

Further Reading:

Council on Environmental Quality & United States Department of State, **Global 2000 Report to the President: Entering the Twenty-First Century.** Washington, DC: U.S. Printing Office, 1980. Available in bookstores and from U.S. Government Printing Office.

Independent Commission on International Development Issues, **North-South: A Program for Survival.** Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1980. 304 pp. $4.95. Available from Oxfam America.

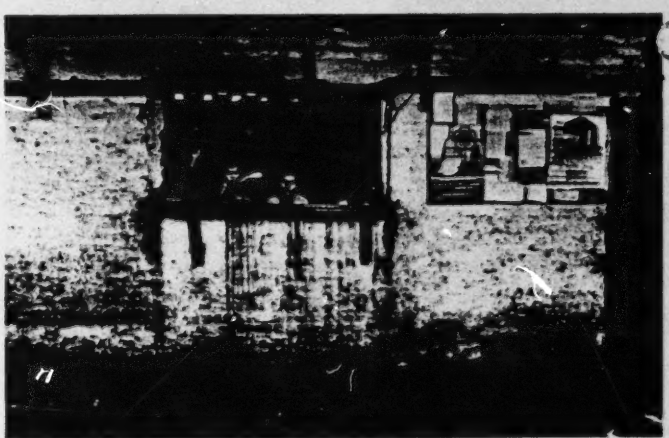
Lappe, Frances Moore and Joseph Collins, **Food First: Beyond the Myth of Scarcity.** New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1979. 619 pp. $3.95. Available from Oxfam America.

Salas, Rafael M., **The State of World Population, 1981.** New York, NY: United Nation Fund for Population Activities. Available from UNFPA, 220 E. 42nd St., New York, NY 10017.

Sivard, Ruth Leger, **World Military and Social Expenditures, 1981.** Leesburg, VA: World Priorities, 1980. 35 pp. $4.00. Available from World Priorities, Box 1003, Leesburg, VA 22075.

United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), **The Fourth World Food Survey, 1977.** Rome, Italy: FAO. Available from FAO Liaison Office for North America, 1776 F St. NW, Washington, DC 20437.

World Bank, **World Development Report, 1980.** Washington, DC: World Bank. Available from World Bank, 1818 H. St., Washington, DC 20433. Free.



Nicaragua. OA photo

Oxfam America is an international development and disaster relief organization based in Boston. Oxfam America was founded in 1970 and is one of six autonomous Oxfams, including two in Canada and one each in Great Britain, Australia and Belgium. The name "Oxfam" came from the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief, founded in England in 1942. Building self-reliance is our most important goal. We fund local, grassroots groups in 21 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. In the United States, Oxfam America works to inform policymakers and the general public about the root causes of world hunger and poverty. Oxfam America neither seeks nor accepts government funds, but relies entirely upon private institutions and citizens.